

“GET A BLUE AND YOU WILL SEE YOUR MONEY BACK AGAIN”: STAFFING AND MARKETING
THE ENGLISH PREP SCHOOL, 1890-1912¹

ABSTRACT

This article explores the ways in which English prep schools were staffed and marketed in the years before the First World War. Its aim more specifically is to employ a biographical approach to consider the emphasis that the schools placed upon sport, and in particular the extent to which they recruited Oxford and Cambridge Blues as teachers (and/or as coaches). It will be suggested that while prep schools certainly placed enormous emphasis upon sport, few of them employed Blues; and that even the small number which did, generally did so only on a part-time, seasonal or casual basis – and made virtually no mention of them in their marketing.

KEYWORDS: prep schools; sport; staffing; marketing; biography

Oxbridge Blues, one suspects, have always tended to think well of themselves.² It was an assessment that, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries at least, many contemporaries seemed to share. Blues figured prominently in the pages of the press, their activities and achievements covered not just by society magazines and specialist sporting publications but by local newspapers, general interest magazines and the national dailies.³ The events at which they competed against each other, the Oxford-Cambridge boat race on the Thames, the Oxford-Cambridge cricket match at Lords, the Oxford-Cambridge rugby match at Queen’s Club, and the Oxford-Cambridge athletics meeting (also at Queen’s) were regarded as occasions of national – not to say international – significance.⁴ The allure of the Blue lived on, it was believed, long after graduation. ‘Get a Blue’, it was observed at the turn of the century, ‘and you will see your money back again.’⁵

The Blues, the vast majority of them, had been at prep school and public school before going up to Oxford and Cambridge.⁶ But whereas there has been an enormous amount of interest in the Victorian and Edwardian public school, prep schools seem easily overlooked. Although of interest – and sometimes fascination – to old boys and ex-masters, they have never attracted much attention in specialist, academic circles. Of course, there exist, as

might be expected, a number of official, or quasi-official, histories of individual schools which, if not overtly celebratory, remain determinedly uncritical in the approach they adopt.⁷ Thus the former headmaster of Temple Grove, one of the so-called 'Famous Five' prep schools, concludes his 1981 history of the school with an assessment of his – and its – achievements. His objectives, he notes contentedly, included 'such ideals as high standards of work and behaviour, tolerance, physical hardiness, loyalty, Christian morality and belief. 'Middle-class values'? To put it at its lowest, it seems folly not to examine them with as non-political an eye as possible, before the baby, in the current phrase, is thrown out with the bath-water.⁸

The few academic historians who have taken an interest in this sector of the educational system adopt, as one would hope, a considerably more critical stance. The trouble is that they have concentrated disproportionately – and extraordinarily – upon just one school, St. Cyprian's in Eastbourne, which Eric Blair (George Orwell) attended during and immediately following the First World War.⁹ Almost the only scholar to range more widely is Donald Leinster-Mackay who for many years was responsible, almost single-handedly, for what was known about this type of school. In a series of articles published during the late 1970s and 1980s, he explored everything from the growth of the schools¹⁰ and the men who ran them,¹¹ to their ethos and curricula,¹² their standards of health and hygiene,¹³ their links with the public schools,¹⁴ and the establishment in 1892 of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools.¹⁵ Finally, in 1984, he published his monograph, *The Rise of the English Prep School*, which was designed, he explained, to make good a major 'gap in educational historiography.'¹⁶ This he did. As a reviewer in this journal confirmed, 'Donald Leinster-Mackays' detailed history of the preparatory school is especially welcome, having been for a decade and more available only in its original three-volume thesis format and as short article excerpts.' However, the volume, he concluded, was not without its limitations: it was, he regretted, 'more richly descriptive than it is tightly analytical.'¹⁷

The same can certainly be said of the only other significant study to appear in the thirty years since 1984. Vyvyan Brendon's *Prep School Children: A Class Apart over Two Centuries*, which was published in 2009, aims 'to look at prep schools through the eyes of children in a way which has not been attempted before.' Her book, she stresses, 'is not a painstaking institutional history such as that written by Donald Leinster-Mackay, with its wealth of

important detail. Nor is it simply a “delightful collection of prep school reminiscences”. However, steering a middle course between description and analysis, between the particular and the general is much more difficult than it seems – and much more difficult than Brendon seems to appreciate. Thus she is confident, as she explains in the introduction to the book, that her ‘comprehensive blend of sources enables us to hear the shared laughter and the private sobs, the recited lessons and the playground cries of prep school pupils down the years.’¹⁸

Despite – or more likely because of – this lack of sustained analysis, both specialists and non-specialists feel able to speak with considerable confidence about the sector. They suggest, as the title of Brendon’s book implies, that prep schools played a key role in the maintenance and reinforcement of class separation and class privilege. A.J.P. Taylor, as always, put it succinctly. ‘The children of the masses went to free day schools until the age of 14; the children of the privileged went to expensive boarding schools until 13. The dividing line here was as hard as that between Hindu castes. No child ever crossed it.’¹⁹

Both specialists and non-specialists suggest too that ‘prep schools were just as orientated towards the Empire as the public schools.’²⁰ It is telling, for example, that the headmaster-cum-historian of Temple Grove entitled his book *Cradle of Empire*,²¹ and that when Leinster-Mackay contributed a chapter to an edited collection on education and imperialism, he subtitled his contribution ‘Cradle and Crèche’ of Empire?²² Others adopt a similar stance. Stressing the importance that the schools placed upon teamwork, sports historian Richard Holt recalls what Baden-Powell wrote to the boys of his old prep school following the Boer War: ‘While you are yet boys is the time to learn to do your duty...At football you do your duty not by playing to show yourself off to the onlookers but to obey the orders of the Captain of the team and to back up so that your side will win the game.’²³

AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The focus of this article is somewhat different. Its aim is to explore another key element – perhaps the key element – of prep school life: the emphasis that the schools placed upon sport, and in particular their employment of Oxford and Cambridge Blues. Sport was central, it seems clear, to prep school life. ‘You should make certain’, parents were advised, ‘that there are good playing grounds attached to the school; and that all the children are

encouraged to indulge in some form of unrestrained physical exercise.’²⁴ The schools, not surprisingly, did all they could to oblige. ‘For something like sixty years’, notes Leinster-Mackay, ‘football and cricket were treated by many preparatory schools as if they were religious exercises.’²⁵ It was an ideology which had its effects, he believes, on virtually every aspect of school life. ‘This cult of athleticism, as rampant eventually in the preparatory as in the public schools, filled school magazines with reports of matches and critical comment, and was responsible for the recruitment of internationals, Blues, or at least county players as staff members.’ Some schools, concludes Leinster-Mackay, were packed with Blues and other sporting giants: ‘at Dunchurch Hall Preparatory School the headmaster was a former Oxford cricket Blue, and of six assistant masters, two had played Rugby for England, one had captained Kent at cricket, one was a famous Corinthian and soccer international, and one had played hockey for England.’²⁶

The article will explore these issues by examining the career of just one of these Blues, Gerald Howard-Smith, a man whose background, education, youth and early adulthood epitomised the cult of athleticism and the opportunities that could accrue from sporting success. Of course, any attempt to use the experiences of a single individual in this way is open to a series of obvious, and seemingly debilitating, criticisms. It is an exercise, it might be objected, which will develop at best, into something which is interesting but unimportant; at worst, into something which is not just uninteresting and unimportant but also seriously misleading. In fact, such concerns are less lethal than they may appear. As V.A.C. Gatrell has pointed out, ‘The narrow universes in which most people experienced the exactions of power [and much else] may often be better appraised in the microcosm than through aggregative analyses, the microcosm illuminating the universal.’²⁷ ‘As historians’, concludes Judith M. Bennett, ‘we work always on two levels: we seek to understand the particularities of past lives, but we also quite rightly seek to place those lives in broader context’.²⁸

It is hoped therefore that by adopting a biographical approach, this article will make a contribution towards our understanding of the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century English prep school. It will argue that the historical literature exaggerates both the scale and the significance of the employment of Blues. The career of Gerald Howard-Smith suggests that while prep schools certainly placed great emphasis upon sport, they did not necessarily

employ Blues; and the few that did, often did so only on a part-time, seasonal or casual basis, and made almost no reference to them in their marketing.

GERALD HOWARD-SMITH

Gerald Howard-Smith (1880-1916) was an exceptional all-round sportsman. The son of a barrister (Philip Howard Smith) and the grandson of a well known biblical and classical scholar (Sir William Smith), he was brought up in comfort in the Kensington area of London.²⁹ Educated first at Temple Grove, he moved on in the autumn of 1894 to that bastion of the British establishment, Eton College.³⁰ Although apparently not particularly gifted academically, he thrived at Eton, receiving the school's ultimate accolade when he was elected a member of the Eton Society, 'Pop'. An enthusiastic all-rounder, he took a full part in the activities of the Eton Society, and performed well in a number of sports, appearing twice in the prestigious Eton v. Harrow match at Lords, the oldest fixture in the cricketing calendar, and one which still attracted crowds of around 15,000.³¹

Howard-Smith was equally successful when he went up, like his father before him, to Trinity College, Cambridge in the autumn of 1899.³² Trinity was one of the keenest sporting colleges in the university and he made his mark, as he had at Eton, in both athletics and cricket. He represented Cambridge three times against Oxford in the high jump, and was a member of a combined Oxford-Cambridge athletics team that toured Canada and the United States of America during the late summer and early autumn of 1901.³³ Although Howard-Smith found the transition from school cricket to University cricket less easy than that from school athletics to University athletics, he again performed at a high level. He represented the University (against, for instance, Yorkshire and the touring South Africans), and played for the Marylebone Cricket Club, better known of course as the MCC (against, for example, the Minor Counties at Lords) before finally obtaining his Blue in the summer of 1903.³⁴ By the time he left Cambridge in 1903, the double-Blue Howard-Smith was a man with more than just a local sporting reputation.³⁵

STAFFING

Prep school teaching had obvious attractions. It provided a haven, it has been said, for the second-rate, those without connections, those with literary aspirations and those with sporting credentials. One 'beneficial by-product' of the prep school system, claimed

Leinster-Mackay, 'was the opportunity it gave to men of literary talents, to novelists and poets, to earn a living in relatively pleasant surroundings.'³⁶ Contemporaries seemed to concur. It was suggested at the turn of the century, for example, that, 'a young man entering upon the scholastic profession with no special aptitudes or distinctions can hardly do better than by associating himself with the headmaster of a well-known preparatory school, gaining his confidence and marrying his daughter.'³⁷ Whatever the practicalities of such a strategy, working for a short time, in a well run school, in a pleasing part of the country might appear highly tempting. 'The young man fresh from the University usually finds everything delightful. 'The boys are jolly, especially out of school. He has plenty of outdoor exercise and rejoices in the games, as he did at College, and he finds his long holidays, with a sufficiency of money in his pocket, delightful also.'³⁸

However misleading such a claim may be, it is easy to see both why young Blues might wish to work at prep schools, and why prep schools might wish to employ them.³⁹ It was a system, J. A. Mangan believes, which became self-sustaining. 'Worshipped "bloods" at [public] school became admired "blues" at university and were enthusiastically head-hunted by the schools as games masters, who in turn sent their "bloods" on to the universities.'⁴⁰ The Blues' combination of youthful enthusiasm, sporting standing and social acceptability made them an attractive proposition, concluded the second master of Hurstpierpoint College in 1897: 'A large percentage of famous 'blues', and of athletic celebrities are to be found occupying at least temporarily, masterships in schools, in which position they are of the highest value to the athletics. A man fresh from the University...knows what to wear and how to wear it; he knows, e.g., that belts are plebeian, and that caps should be worn so as not to show a fringe...'⁴¹

TEMPLE GROVE

Temple Grove was a natural choice for a family like the Howard-Smiths. With its long history, its proximity to London, its fees of over a hundred pounds a year and its royal connections, it was at once convenient, exclusive, well known and highly regarded.⁴² By the time his parents sent nine-year old Gerald Howard-Smith there in the autumn of 1889,⁴³ team sports were firmly established, as they were at other prep schools, as an essential element of the all-round education thought necessary for boys from his privileged

background. Indeed, the first meeting of the Incorporated Association of Preparatory Schools in 1892, which was chaired by the headmaster of Temple Grove, was called ostensibly to discuss the size of cricket pitches and cricket balls that were suitable for boys under the age of fifteen.⁴⁴

Temple Grove, like other schools of its type, placed as much – if not more – emphasis upon the cultivation of character as it did even upon the learning of the classics. It was an endeavour in which, as is well known, sport was regarded as crucial. Although Temple Grove's historians are critical of the sporting facilities it provided,⁴⁵ this seems unduly harsh. The only surviving photograph, c. 1890, of a game of cricket being played during the time that the young Howard-Smith was a pupil reveals no lack of resources. Rather the reverse. The boys pictured are using proper bats, pads and stumps, are wearing flannels, and are playing on a large, seemingly well tended field, set against an impressive backdrop of mature trees and spacious grounds.⁴⁶ Whatever the facilities available, the headmaster, the Rev. J.H. Edgar, was a keen cricketer, and by the time Howard-Smith had arrived at the school a few years earlier, the game was well established. Temple Grove selected its teams on merit (with Howard-Smith playing for the first eleven during his final year), arranged for team photographs to be taken, and had a fixture list which included matches against local prep schools such as Eagle House, Tabor's and Hawtrey's, and later Colet Court, Elstree, Sandroyd and Stanmore Park.⁴⁷

However, Temple Grove's emphasis upon sport did not extend, it seems, to the employment of Blues.⁴⁸ Of the nine staff teaching at the school in 1896 (two years after Howard-Smith left), none, so far as can be discovered, had achieved this particular Oxbridge accolade. Indeed, one of the nine, Charles Geoghegan, had lost an arm; while another, Julius Neumann, is described as 'a fat man with a beard...[who] wore spectacles with lenses about half-an-inch thick which magnified his eyes fearsomely.'⁴⁹ But times, it must be said, were changing. A boy who joined the school towards the end of the decade (four or five years after Howard-Smith had moved on to Eton), recalls that during his early days at Temple Grove, 'the masters of the Upper 4th and the Lower 4th were both Cambridge Athletic Blues'.⁵⁰

NORTHAW PLACE

It was not long after leaving Cambridge that Gerald Howard-Smith returned to the prep school world in which he had received his early education. But when he began teaching – or perhaps coaching – in 1906, it was on a seasonal, part-time basis; and it was not at his alma mater Temple Grove, but at two other establishments on the outskirts of London: Northaw Place and Stoke House.

The first, Northaw Place Preparatory School, had been founded in 1881 by the Reverend Frederick John Hall, and occupied a late seventeenth-century mansion not far from Potters Bar, fifteen miles or so to the north of the capital. Yet despite the grandeur of its setting, the school was less well known, less exclusive and less highly regarded than Temple Grove.⁵¹ This may have been because, even by contemporary prep school standards, Northaw Place seemingly exhibited an exceptional interest in sport. The two men who ran the school in the years before the First World War, the Reverend Hall and his fellow clergyman, the Reverend W.F. Money, reputedly took a resolutely narrow view of the prep school curriculum. They were interested, it has been said, 'in cricket and in the bible, in that order, and in very little else'.⁵² However, this did not mean that they sought out Blues like Howard-Smith to work at the school. Perhaps it was too small, too poor and too insular to think of engaging such staff. Little is known about the way the school was run, but there is no indication of Blues working there. In 1914, eight years after Howard-Smith left, Northaw Place was home to just 40 pupils and employed just five members of staff – none of whom, so far as one can judge, displayed any particular aptitude for sport.⁵³

STOKE HOUSE

Stoke House Preparatory School, the other school at which Howard-Smith worked in 1906, stood in its own grounds of twenty acres or so at Stoke Poges, a mile or so to the north of Slough.⁵⁴ It was much the same size as Northaw Place, but almost certainly more successful academically.⁵⁵ It was proud of its record in securing scholarships to major public schools, claiming in 1913, for instance, to have educated some 800 boys since its opening in 1867. Of these, 74, it announced with considerable satisfaction, had gone on to Winchester, 150 to Charterhouse and 180 to Eton.⁵⁶

Stoke House, like Northaw Place, set great store by sport. Edward Hagarty Parry, who took over the school from his father in 1892, had been an outstanding footballer, captaining both

Charterhouse School and Oxford University, winning the FA cup with the Old Carthusians in 1881, and playing three times for England (once against Scotland and twice against Wales).⁵⁷ It is not surprising therefore that sport – athletics, cricket, fives and particularly football – played a major part in the day-to-day life of the school.⁵⁸ When twelve-year old Jim Neville joined Stoke House in 1909, his letters home to his parents were full of the teams he hoped to play for, the teams he was chosen to play for, the matches they won, the matches they lost. There was a lot to tell: ‘We have a red and blue shirt as well as a cap when we get our colours’, he explained to his mother.⁵⁹ ‘Well to begin with’, he went on proudly, ‘I think that I must tell you that in the match yesterday I got my “Colours”’.⁶⁰ It was not just a matter of winning and losing, he made clear to his father: ‘We played St.Georges yesterday [and lost], but Mr Parry was not angry, as he said we played up alrighth.’⁶¹

It was an environment in which a Blue like Gerald Howard-Smith might well feel at home. Although he only worked at the school during the summer of 1906, he kept in contact after he left. Returning three years later to play cricket (for Hugh-Onslow’s XI) in a match against the school staff, he performed well, scoring 38 out of a total of 254, and taking four (and possibly five) wickets.⁶² Even ten years after his brief period of teaching/coaching at Stoke House, he was remembered, it seems, with both respect and affection. When he was killed in action in 1916, the school magazine marked his death with more than conventional pieties. Its obituary refers explicitly to his sporting prowess. Gerald Howard-Smith, ‘a very well-known cricketer and athlete at Eton and Cambridge was with us at Stoke Poges for the summer term of 1906, leaving us to take up legal work. He was immensely popular with everybody and as a soldier was brave beyond comparison.’⁶³

However, Howard-Smith was seemingly the exception that proves the rule. For all his popularity, for all his sporting prowess and for all the emphasis that Stoke House placed upon sport, its staff room was no more packed with Blues than those at Temple Grove or Northaw Place. Nor, so far as is known, did the school make any effort to publicise its employment of a Blue such as Howard-Smith. The boys (and their families) knew, no doubt, whether their masters had any claim to sporting – or other – fame. Twelve-year old Jim Neville was present at the match between Hugh-Onslow’s XI and the Stoke House staff in 1909, the game in which Howard-Smith played so well. However, he was struck by the performance, not of Howard-Smith, but by that of one of the current masters, N.D.C. Ross,

who scored 84 runs. Mr Ross, an impressed Jim Neville told his mother, had been – not a Blue like Howard-Smith – but captain of his college at Cambridge.⁶⁴

MARKETING

But how typical of prep school teachers was Gerald Howard-Smith? And how representative of the sector were the schools with which he was associated? Such questions, though obvious and important, are a good deal easier to ask than they are to answer satisfactorily. It is difficult to judge the typicality of Howard-Smith because so little is known about other prep school teachers. And it is not easy to assess the representativeness of Temple Grove, Northaw Place and Stoke House because we know so little about other prep schools – and what little we do know suggests that they were strikingly heterogeneous, varying widely in resources, size, success, longevity and social standing.⁶⁵ There were three types of prep school, suggested one schoolmaster. ‘First, schools attached to the public schools themselves, as at Dulwich and Bradfield; secondly, true preparatories, many of them kept by men with some genius for the work who take great moral precautions to keep their schools morally fit and strictly limit the age; thirdly, smaller and often cheaper preparatories whose owners are driven to take boys of any age or antecedents.’⁶⁶

However, help is at hand. The schools’ advertising in newspapers and trade directories can be – and has been – used in order to understand better the still little known world of ‘teaching in the market-place’.⁶⁷ Also useful – and much more manageable – is *Paton’s List of Schools and Tutors*. Published annually, it was designed, it explained, ‘with a view to assisting Parents in their choice of Schools by placing before them in a concise and practical form particulars of *many* of the best English Schools for Boys and Girls’.⁶⁸ However, it can be used too by historians wishing to analyse the ways in which late nineteenth and early twentieth-century private schools marketed themselves to parents, guardians and other interested parties.

Paton’s List confirms that the schools with which Howard-Smith was associated, Temple Grove, Northaw Place and Stoke House, were at one with their peers in the emphasis that they placed upon sport (along with drill, gymnastics and other forms of physical activity). More than 90 per cent of the 142 English boys’ prep schools advertising in *Paton’s* in 1911-12 stressed their sporting ethos, the place of sport (and drill) in their curricula, the

superiority of their sporting facilities, and/or the care with which they taught and supervised sport (and other physical activities).⁶⁹

They made great play of their sporting (and other) facilities. Stoke House's listing, for instance, stressed that it offered its pupils 'cricket and football fields, a good playground, a fives court...a gymnasium...and a swimming bath, 60 ft. by 25 ft.'⁷⁰ Stoke House's competitors marketed themselves in much the same way. The Glebe House School at Hunstanton made much of its 'cricket and football fields,...gravel playground, and fives courts.'⁷¹ The Priory School at Great Malvern highlighted its possession of 'large fields for football and cricket, a well equipped gymnasium, carpenter's shop, and school library'.⁷² Meanwhile, Brockhurst School at Church Stretton drew attention to the fact that it had a 'large cricket and football field, gymnasium, fives courts, private golf links, miniature rifle range, and carpenter's shop' – and illustrated its entry with a half-page photograph of a cricket match in progress.⁷³

The schools, a good number of them, stressed too the quality of the supervision and coaching that they were able to offer. Boys at St James's Catholic Preparatory School for Young Gentlemen in Uxbridge, for example, were trained in 'Drill by an Army Instructor',⁷⁴ while Holland House School in Hove provided its pupils with 'Supervision and coaching in games' – and, like Brockhurst, included a picture of a cricket match as part of its entry.⁷⁵ Others promised a little more. Wadham House School (which was also based in Hove) provided, it noted, 'Careful supervision and coaching in all games.'⁷⁶ Meanwhile, St Lawrence College, Ramsgate explained that it benefited from 'a staff of five University men quite apart from visiting Masters', which meant that, 'All games are played in sets, each of which is under the direct supervision of a Master.'⁷⁷

Moreover, some prep school heads obviously regarded their enthusiasm for sport as a major – if not the major – selling point distinguishing their schools from those of their competitors. R.W. Hunt, the headmaster of the Beacon School in Crowborough stressed that, 'He is a keen athlete, and personally directs and takes part in the outdoor amusements of the pupils – cricket, football, hockey, and gardening.'⁷⁸ Arthur E. Voules, the principal of Oxford House School in South Croydon, was another keen to emphasise his commitment and credentials. Sport, it was explained, was central to the Oxford House's ethos and

curriculum. 'Physical training is carried on side by side with the work of the schoolroom. Mr Voules (Oxford Gymnastic Medallist, 1877) himself giving instruction in gymnastics and swimming.'⁷⁹

However, the prep schools advertising in *Paton's* in 1911-12 – during what is generally regarded as the apogee of athleticism's hold over private education – made virtually no reference to the employment of the specialist teachers, the 'internationals, Blues, or at least county players as staff members', whom Leinster-Mackay believed to be so important.⁸⁰ Stoke House again was at one with its competitors. Just two of the 142 entries mentioned the provision of such high level, specialised coaching. Even the two establishments that did so, Beechmont School in Sevenoaks and Tredennyke School in Worcester, made it clear that such provision was available only on a seasonal – and in all probability a part-time – basis. At Beechmont, the boys' games, it noted, were 'organised, and always superintended by the Masters, assisted in the summer by a cricket professional.'⁸¹ At Tredennyke, both cricket and football, it was emphasised, were 'carefully supervised, and a professional cricket instructor attends during the summer months.'⁸²

What is striking is that not one of the 142 schools advertising in *Paton's* in 1911-12 made any reference at all to employing an Oxford or Cambridge Blue. This does not mean, of course, that they did not do so. But it is instructive for all that. For while it would be wrong to suggest that Gerald Howard-Smith was the only Oxbridge Blue to secure a prep school post in the years before the first world war, the schools' failure to publicise the existence of such staff provides an indication of the weight that that they accorded – or rather did not accord – to the employment of these talented and privileged young men.

NOT ALWAYS A POOR MAN

Gerald Howard-Smith knew, along with others from his privileged background, that prep school teaching might be socially acceptable, and might well prove to be very agreeable – but only in the short term. The young man working in a prep school must not, he was warned, 'look forward to remaining an assistant-master in such a school, or he will always be a poor man. In such a position he cannot hope to start with a salary of more than £100 a year, besides board and lodging, which is worth to him another £50 or £70, though advertisements may be seen offering as little as £50. He cannot hope to end **With More**

than £200.⁸³ It is not surprising therefore that Howard-Smith taught for only a short time, perhaps no more than a few months, before switching, as we have seen, from education to the law. Following his father – both professionally and physically – he trained as a solicitor, moved to Wolverhampton, became a partner in a local firm, and resumed his sporting interests.⁸⁴

Appointed captain of the first team at Wolverhampton cricket club in 1912, he was welcomed, not just as a good player, but as ‘a gentleman of experience and one capable of imparting ripe judgement into his work.’⁸⁵ Indeed, his appointment made even the national press, the *Daily Mail* welcoming him as ‘the son of the well-known local county court judge, who seldom misses one of the club’s matches.’ ‘The new captain,’ it went on, ‘who is well known locally as one of the partners in a very old-established firm of solicitors, is just the man for the post. A sportsman in the best sense of the term, he is a capital bat and a deadly bowler, while no one will dispute his popularity.’⁸⁶ So it was that Gerald Howard-Smith brought with him to Wolverhampton, it was believed, the very combination of social and sporting qualities that the prep school at which he had been educated, and the prep schools at which he had taught, made such efforts to instil into the boys who attended them during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

SPORT, STAFFING AND MARKETING

It is easy then to misunderstand the role that Oxbridge Blues played in the staffing and marketing of late nineteenth and early twentieth-century prep schools. It is believed, however, that the biographical approach adopted in this article provides a useful prism through which to observe, and understand better, certain still neglected aspects of this still neglected sector of private education. It seems that despite the attention that the press lavished upon the Blues’ achievements, despite the emphasis that prep schools placed upon sport, and despite the apparent attractions of employing energetic, young sportsmen straight from university, few schools chose to do so. Moreover, the few schools that did recruit in this way, made remarkably little – in fact virtually nothing – of the fact in their marketing.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the advice of Richard Hawkins and Anthony Whitaker, for the financial support of the British Academy and for the encouragement of my colleagues at the University of Wolverhampton.

- ¹ The quotation is from Eric Parker, 'Private Schools: Ancient and Modern', *Longman's Magazine*, November 1896/April 1897, cited by Donald Leinster-Mackay, *The Rise of the English Prep School* (Lewes: Falmer Press, 1984), 196. See also Eric Parker in *The Preparatory Schools Review*, 11 (1898). Prep schools were, and are, so-called because they prepared their pupils for entry to the public schools.
- ² *Centenary 28th June 1995: Transatlantic Series History and Match Programme*, 1995; Christopher Thorne, 'Blues and the Blues Committee: Some Historical Notes' (Cambridge, 1996); J.A. Mangan, 'Bloods, Blues and Barbarians: Some Aspects of Late Victorian Oxbridge', in *Disreputable Pleasures: Less Virtuous Victorians at Play*, eds Mike Huggins and J.A. Mangan (Cass, 2004).
- ³ For some early twentieth-century examples, see *Tatler*, September 11, 1901; *Sporting Chronicle*, April 2, 1900; *Cambridge Chronicle*, July 19, 1901; *Spectator*, March 23, 1907.
- ⁴ For example, *Daily Mail*, March 21, 1902; *Penny Illustrated*, April 4, 1903; *New York Times*, March 29, 1903; *Otago Witness*, May 20, 1903.
- ⁵ Parker, 'Private Schools'.
- ⁶ For example, *Straits Times*, September 27, 1901.
- ⁷ See the bibliography in Vyvyan Brendon, *Prep School Children: A Class Apart over Two Centuries* (London: Continuum, 2009).
- ⁸ Meston Batchelor, *Cradle of Empire: A Preparatory School Through Nine Reigns* (Chichester: Phillimore, 1981), 106-7. For another sympathetic, though more nuanced, assessment, see Simon Wright, *Waterfield's School: A Preparatory School in its Victorian Heyday* (Guildford: Herons Ghyll Press, 1994).
- ⁹ R.D. Pearce, 'The Prep School and Imperialism: The Example of Orwell's St. Cyprian's', *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 23 (1991); Robert Pearce, 'Truth and Falsehood: George Orwell's Prep School Woes', *Review of English Studies* xliii (1992). Orwell's account of his years at the school is to be found in George Orwell, 'Such, Such Were the Joys', *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell* (London: Penguin, 1970), vol. iv, 379-422. There are, of course, other passing references. See, for example, Christine Heward, *Making a Man of Him: Parents and their Sons' Education at an English Public School 1929-50* (London: Routledge, 1988), 63.
- ¹⁰ Donald Leinster-Mackay, 'The Evolution of T'Other Schools: An examination of the Nineteenth Century Development of the Private Preparatory School', *History of Education* 5 (1976).
- ¹¹ Donald Leinster-Mackay, 'Pioneers in Progressive Education: Some Little-Known Proprietary and Private School Exemplars', *History of Education* 9 (1980).
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